

## The more things change, the more they stay the same?

**The last few months have seen a plethora of criminal justice policy consultations. Arguably there has been a move to push a series of policy consultations and decisions at the outset of devolution, before the appointed Minister has had a chance to settle in and familiarise himself with the issues. In CAJ's view there is a disturbing and recurring theme in many recent consultations to the effect that the proposals would bring Northern Ireland into line with practice and policy in England and Wales without due regard to local needs and local circumstances. A recurring theme in our responses to these consultations has therefore been, this is Northern Ireland, with its own unique needs and priorities, not England and Wales.**

An example of this is the proposal to remove the role of lay magistrates in issuing summonses. The consultation document from the NI Court and Tribunal Service locates the context for the proposal as the report of the Criminal Justice Inspection on avoidable delay. The relevant section (7.26) of that report refers to delays caused by, for example, lay magistrates from rural areas having to travel to Belfast to sign summonses, and recommends that "alternative arrangements for signing of summonses should be implemented. This should include the use of electronic signatures which are authorised by a PPS prosecutor." CAJ did not read this as recommending that the role of lay magistrates in signing summonses be removed altogether, rather that alternative arrangements for the signing of summonses be implemented. We believe that maintaining the role and input of lay magistrates is an important practice for this jurisdiction.

The consultation document then refers to the decision of the system-wide Delay Action Team (DAT) charged with examining avoidable delay. While conceding that the arrangement "does not add a lot of time to the process in the general run of cases" that Team concluded that it "in reality...cannot be regarded as a quasi-judicial function" and it should be removed. This position is directly contrary to the findings of the Criminal Justice Review Team, who in their report in 2000 outlined the functions of the then Justices of the Peace, including in relation to the issuing of summonses, and went on to: "register our view that many of the functions outlined above are extremely important. They affect the liberty, privacy and other human rights of the individual, require the exercise of judicial discretion and involve a degree of oversight of the processes employed by the police and other investigating agencies."

While the proposal may bring Northern Ireland into line with England and Wales, as outlined in the consultation document, the operation of the criminal justice system in Northern Ireland is substantially different and engages a very different history relevant to any changes in practice. CAJ agrees with the report of the Criminal Justice Review that the role of magistrates in this process is an important judicial one that serves to protect human rights. We believe that the current proposal removes an important judicial check and balance and invests more discretion in the PPS without adequate safeguards and accountability.

Another seemingly fast-tracked consultation is that on the integration of District Policing Partnerships (DPPs) and Community Safety Partnerships. Issued in the weeks running up to devolution, this document fundamentally endangers the Patten vision of DPPs as consultative community mechanisms tasked with holding the police to account at a local level. The imperative is seemingly to meet a deadline of the changes in Council boundaries under the Review of Public Administration anticipated for May 2011, but which, it is becoming increasingly clear, will not happen by that date. CAJ will analyse the proposals in full in next month's issue, however we are concerned that the critical determinant in this review process should be that local accountability mechanisms are a significant part of police reform more broadly and any integration should reflect that recent history and build on learning to date. If devolution of criminal justice and policing powers is to be meaningful, it should be about local control of and accountability for decision-making in relation to criminal justice and policing policy. It should be about local solutions for local problems, considering our particular context and the historical lack of confidence for some communities in policing processes and transparency and accountability of the police and criminal justice system.

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## CAJ visits Macedonia

**“Everything is fine in Macedonia. And if you’d be so kind, Macedonia would like to join the EU.” This is not the official slogan of the government of Macedonia but you would be forgiven for thinking otherwise or for confusing it with the internationally popular phrase, “Conflict? What conflict?” In March, CAJ visited the independent Republic not as gatekeepers of entry into the EU – which we were widely regarded as by those we met – but as part of a Policing & Justice International Learning Exchange organised through the MOST project at Mediation Northern Ireland.**

Macedonia is a society divided into two main ethnic groupings, Macedonian Christians (66% of population) and Albanian Muslims (23%). But don’t be confused; despite the massacre that happened to their Albanian brothers and sisters just over the Šar Mountains during the 1998-99 Kosovo war, everything is fine in Macedonia. At the time of writing, a fourth mass grave has been found in Serbia of slain Albanians who were transported there and secretly buried to hide the atrocities. Two other mass graves were discovered in Kosovo. In each case, most of the bodies were those of civilians, including women and children. But, some would have us believe that in Macedonia everything is different.

Our group learned this for ourselves when we visited the Police Training Centre in Skopje. We were told that new recruits share a room with their ethnic counterparts and are required to teach each other their own native language. This arrangement causes no problems and every year 100% of recruits graduate. At the Police Station in Tearce, we were further assured that the integration of former Albanian guerrillas with serving Macedonia police results in perfect relations. There are no disciplinary actions required and no dismissals. This, we were told, was not attributed to reforms in policies and procedures or even good training as much as good ‘administration.’ Clearly, concerns raised by the United Nations Committee Against Torture (CAT) and published in a May 2008 report regarding “allegations of torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment, or punishment committed by law enforcement personnel” as well as concerns with “a lack of prompt and effective investigations and prosecutions in this respect” have been eradicated in the past two years.

We then made our way to Shemsevo village using the same road Crusaders of the First Crusade used in 1096 when they passed through Macedonia. Upon arrival in Shemsevo, our group visited a primary school where students attend either morning or afternoon classes. Despite the complete withdrawal of Macedonian students from the school (the first of six ethnically mixed schools in

the region to polarise), resources still do not meet need and children attend half-day sessions only.

The director of the now exclusively Albanian school spoke with quiet confidence about his students and the village noting that post-conflict aid has disappeared, factory and businesses remain closed, and poverty and unemployment are endemic. This was the first time we did not hear that Macedonia is fine. During our classroom meeting the director was seated between two translators, one on his left to translate from his native Albanian language to Macedonian, a second to translate from Macedonian to English. When asked why the conflict occurred in 2001, he succinctly stated: “Marginalisation and no engagement results in an exchange of bullets.” On the wall above his head was the only picture in the classroom - the Albanian fighter Haim Frasheri.

In Macedonia, Albanians contend they are relegated to the status of second-class citizens. They continue to demand increased employment opportunities and greater cultural and educational rights. Albanians also maintain their language should be recognised as an official language and receive state support. They continue to seek greater representation in the government, armed forces and police. The majority of Macedonians, however, contend that the Albanian minority enjoys rights that are comparable to or better than other minority communities in Europe and are therefore sufficient. They are antagonistic to Albanian demands for autonomy which they fear could lead to eventual unification with Albania. But everything is fine in Macedonia.



*Mick Beyers (centre), CAJ’s Policing Programme Officer, alongside other members of the delegation in Macedonia*

## Bill of Rights - Where to from here?



**When policing and justice were transferred in April to the Northern Ireland Assembly, some politicians claimed that the final piece of the jigsaw had been put in place. This claim was not quite correct. Whilst devolution has been completed the democratic system envisaged by the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement and St Andrews Agreement is still short of the finishing line.**

There are a number of outstanding matters of crucial importance to the constitutional and social transformation of our society still to be addressed. Among these matters is a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland. The devolved institutions of government in Northern Ireland are supposed to be bound by the requirements of such a Bill. They are intended to operate in accordance with a human rights framework that encompasses the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and reflects the particular circumstances of our society.

But this framework is not yet agreed. While the rules of engagement for politicians may have been finalised, there remains a question mark as to how in Northern Ireland, government ought to behave towards its people. This is an issue that a Bill of Rights, supplementing the ECHR ought to address, and it is something that should concern all of us.

The Human Rights Commission had hoped that a consultation paper issued by the Northern Ireland Office in November 2009 would take us one step closer to a Bill of Rights. Having been presented with comprehensive advice in December 2008, the NIO's response was a disappointment, demonstrating a lack of understanding of the purpose and functions of a Bill of Rights. It also failed to take appropriate account of international standards, even suggesting a lowering of the current standards, and misrepresented the Commission's advice. The Commission concluded that as a national human rights institution, it could not accept the paper as a genuine effort to increase protections in Northern Ireland.

So where do we go from here? The NIO consultation is over, and the new Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition is in power. We would expect the newly appointed, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Owen

Patterson MP, to publish the consultation findings and thereafter, state the government's intention on future legislative proposals.

There has, of course, been much debate prior to the election about the future of the Human Rights Act itself alongside proposals for new constitutional measures such as a UK Bill of Rights and Responsibilities. We would hope that the future is now a little more secure. But we still await the impact a new government may have on civil liberties and the proposal for a Freedom or Great Repeal Bill.

Regardless of the political future, three Human Rights Commissions in the UK are agreed that there must be no regression from the protections afforded by the Human Rights Act. The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission will continue to advise on any legislative proposals supplementing the Act, as proposed in the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement. We have stated our view that this can be done by ring fencing the Act 1998 and then building upon it.

Progress in the promotion and protection of human rights in Northern Ireland was encapsulated in the Agreement in 1998, with the expressed need for a "new beginning" through the "protection and vindication for the human rights of all". With the new government now in place, there is no reason why legislative progress cannot be made towards realising a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland. Equally difficult and significant matters have been successfully brought to their logical conclusion.

*Professor Monica McWilliams  
 Chief Commissioner  
 Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission*



# United Nations Convention on the Rights

**In May 2008, a new international agreement was introduced which confirmed that people with disabilities have the same human rights as everyone else. The United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities has been ratified by 82 countries to date, including the United Kingdom in June 2009. But how will this Convention be implemented and what does it really mean for people living with disabilities in Northern Ireland?**

On his first visit to Northern Ireland, Ron McCallum, a Professor of Labour Law and current Chair of the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, tells an inspirational story of how he overcame barriers to achieve great success in his career, came to be elected as Chair of the UN Committee for Persons with Disabilities and what he thinks the Convention will mean for people with disabilities living in Northern Ireland.

## **Overcoming the Barriers**

Originally from Victoria, Australia, Ron McCallum's eyesight was destroyed when he developed retinopathy of prematurity, having been given pure oxygen when he was born 10 weeks premature in October 1948. He was educated at an institutional blind primary school but attended an ordinary secondary high school. Having worked hard, Ron went on to study law at Monash University, Melbourne, Victoria.

However, the lack of technology in 1970 prevented Ron from achieving his ambition of working as a barrister, as all documents had to be read to him. Ron realised that he could control his reading better as a Law Teacher and went on to achieve great success.

## **Achieving Success**

"I became a Scholar under the British Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan and studied in Canada. I then taught Labour Law at Monash University, Melbourne and in 1993 I became the first Professor of Labour Law in Australia at the University of Sydney. I was the first totally blind person to be appointed to a full Professorship in any field, at any Australian and New Zealand university."

From 2002-07 Ron was Dean of the Faculty of Law at the University of Sydney, one of Australia's oldest and most respected law schools. Ron is also Deputy Chair of Vision Australia, Australia's largest blind organisation.

## **Representing his Nation**

Given his experience as a lawyer and his work with Vision Australia, it is no surprise that Ron was approached by the Government to represent Australia on the United Nations Committee for Persons with Disabilities. "In November 2008, I was elected as one of

the twelve inaugural members of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, whose function it is to monitor the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities." Ron quickly earned the respect of his international peers on the Committee and was unanimously elected to serve as Chair of Committee for 2010.

## **A Convention for the Forgotten**

When asked why he felt the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities was necessary, Ron explained: "...because we persons with disabilities are not mentioned in other Conventions. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) protects the human rights of people of different races, religions and ideologies, but it failed to mention people with disabilities."

## **Changing Perceptions**

"The other importance is that the Convention operates on the social model of disability. In the past, we people with disabilities have been perceived as individuals who require protection and evoke sympathy rather than respect. This Convention is a major step towards changing the perception of disability and ensures that societies recognise that all people must be provided with the opportunities to live life to their fullest potential. We need cooperation from the state to allow us to live our full lives in the community."

## **Delivering Real Change**

It is the task of Northern Ireland Executive to develop the Framework for implementing and monitoring the Convention in Northern Ireland. Asked what the Convention will mean for the one in five people living with disabilities in Northern Ireland, Ron explained:

"I hope that the task of the government in Northern Ireland and Great Britain in implementing the Convention and also the task of reporting to the Committee on which I sit, focuses governments' minds upon the civil, political, economic and cultural rights of persons with disabilities. I hope that the Convention will deliver real changes for people with disabilities, facilitate improved access to buildings for example and also increase training and employment opportunities. I am hoping that the Convention will ultimately improve the lives of persons with disabilities."

## **Changing the Law**

"The importance of the Convention at national level needs to be realised, as it is at this level that we need the changes in legislation to be made. I think the proposed Mental Capacity and Mental Health Legislation for Northern Ireland is a real step forward. We don't know the full details of the legislation as yet but most of the laws on mental capacity in the common law and countries that

## of People with Disabilities

follow that form of law are backward. This is a real step forward and I think the Convention was a real impetus for this. I hope that the new legislation will be modelled around the Convention.”

### Advice to Government

“The Convention does not dictate how countries should implement it, as Governments vary around the world, from very developed to developing nations. However, my advice to the Northern Ireland Government would be that the Convention makes it clear that the framework for implementation must at least involve the full participation of persons with disabilities and their representative organisations. It should be a broad consultative framework which helps the Government to implement, monitor and protect the Convention.”

### A Collaborative Process

During his visit to Northern Ireland, Professor McCallum led a seminar focused on how the UN Convention on Human Rights for People with Disabilities should be implemented in Northern Ireland, the first event of its kind, since the Government ratified the Convention in 2009. The seminar was organised by Disability Action’s Centre on Human Rights for People with Disabilities.

Speaking after the event Ron expressed, “I was amazed to see representatives of Government, the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission and the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland discussing with persons with disabilities and their organisations in a very constructive way how the Convention should be implemented.

This is what the UN Committee expects from states - a collaborative process to implement, protect and monitor the Convention. This meeting was the perfect example of how consultations should take place. It has been a great honour to be here.”

*Sinead Owens*  
*Communications and Campaigns Officer*  
*Disability Action’s Centre on Human Rights for People with Disabilities*

### Further Information

If you are a person with a disability or a representative organisation, it is important that you understand the Convention and recognise when human rights are being violated.

Everyone in society has a duty to understand the rights of people with disabilities and to ensure these rights are protected and exercised.

Disability Action’s Centre on Human Rights for People with Disabilities works to promote and protect the human rights of people with disabilities in Northern Ireland, and to foster a culture of human rights for disabled people through education, capacity building, campaigning, lobbying, influencing and legal challenge.

For further information on the Convention or on training opportunities, contact Disability Action’s Centre on Human Rights for People with Disabilities:  
Telephone: 028 9029 7880  
Textphone: 028 9029 7882  
Email: [humanrights@disabilityaction.org](mailto:humanrights@disabilityaction.org)  
Web: [www.disabilityhumanrights.org](http://www.disabilityhumanrights.org)



*Monica Wilson, Chief Executive Disability Action welcomes Professor Ron McCallum, Chair UN Committee on Human Rights for People with Disabilities*

## New Section 75 Guidelines - First Impressions

**The Equality Commission has finally released its new guide on s75 Northern Ireland Act 1998. On first sight, CAJ is very concerned by the seismic shift in the status of the Guide, which has been downgraded from obligations to recommendations. Despite attempts to introduce a more practical and outcome-focussed approach to s75, the Guide does not provide for its own enforcement, which has the potential to limit its application. CAJ will undertake a more detailed study of the Guide in due course, but the summary below outlines a few of the main issues arising.**

S75 requires over 200 public authorities to have due regard to the promotion of equality of opportunity when carrying out their functions in Northern Ireland. Its object is to mainstream equality considerations into all public policy. The application of s75 is regulated by Schedule 9 and Commission guidelines, which together show the required content of public authorities' equality schemes. As such, the Guide is critical to the way in which s75 operates in practice.

Since s75 came into force, the Commission's guidelines have prescribed a two-part procedure for its application. Namely, a public authority screens each policy for equality impacts and, if found, an equality impact assessment ('EQIA') is carried out. Consultation is required at both stages. In a sea change to current practice, the Guide has made this two-part procedure optional.

In effect, each public authority will be able to assess the equality impacts of its policies in different ways, which could create more onerous work for public authorities, the Commission and consultees. Also, as compliance with s75 is judged by reference to each public authority's equality scheme, it could reduce legal certainty as to when policies are s75 compliant.

It is regrettable that a consistent procedure is not made obligatory, particularly as para 3(a) Schedule 9 states that equality schemes "shall conform to any guidelines as to form or content which are issued by the Commission with the approval of the Secretary of State." In general, the downgrading of the Guide's status, from legal obligation to discretionary recommendation, fundamentally weakening its ability to ensure the effective mainstreaming of equality.

The Guide's non-obligatory nature also limits its stated aim of changing the focus of s75 from process to outcomes. The Guide recommends a new 'audit of inequalities', where public authorities would analyse the actual inequalities in our society. From this evidence base, each public authority is encouraged to set out an

'action plan', which would determine tangible outcomes to be reached through action measures, performance indicators and timescales. The potential effectiveness of these practical tools is reduced, due to their optional and non-enforceable nature.

Where audits of inequalities and action plans are used by public authorities, data collection would become more central to the application of s75. In order to set baselines and measure targets, public authorities would need more recourse to enhanced monitoring systems on equality impacts. Where used, this would help correct the general disregard of the monitoring duty within s75.

In addition, public authorities could now mitigate a policy's adverse effects at the screening stage, which is both practical and true to the principle of mainstreaming. However, it is regretted that the emphasis is placed on 'mitigation' rather than the promotion of equality, which is the purpose of the s75.

On balance, the Guide's emphasis on practicality has arguably gone too far, and could lead the application of s75 away from its original object. First, consultation is no longer required on screening. The Guide does allow for concerns to be raised, if evidence is provided. However, this shifts the burden of proof on to the public, which is inappropriate given that the statute places the s75 duties on public authorities.

Also, by the time a concern has been raised, the policy may already be developed or implemented, and so difficult to change. Most critically, the Guide is arguably in conflict with Schedule 9, which requires that public authorities consult on 'the likely impact of policies' (para 2(b)). We would suggest that public authorities consult when policies are 'screened out', as EQIAs allow for consultation on those policies that are 'screened in.'

Secondly, the emphasis on practicality could have a limiting effect on the otherwise overarching remit of s75. While we welcome the introduction of audits and action plans, we are mindful that these vehicles could limit equality mainstreaming to those inequalities identified in the audit or action plan. The more thorough knowledge of inequalities will help public authorities to apply s75 in practice, but could also blind them to less obvious or newly emerging inequalities. This underlines the need for effective consultation.

CAJ is disappointed that stakeholders were not given an opportunity to comment on the Guide before it was submitted to the Secretary of State for approval. We believe that a more open and thorough discussion of the final draft could have produced a better document, and limited the potential problems in its application.

## Book Review - 'The Rule of Law'

The rule of law is probably something that all Just News readers would embrace as a “good thing”. But, if required, could you define it easily? Tom Bingham, who has successively held offices as Master of the Rolls, Lord Chief Justice of England and Wales, and Senior Law Lord of the UK, has written a marvellous book on the topic. Though the author notes himself that he has been “shamelessly anglo-centric” in his choice of milestones, the book is a “must read” for anyone who cares about justice, the law, and the interplay between politics and the law. While emphasising the complexity of the principle of the rule of law, it also seeks to strip it down to its simple component parts.

Sometimes the component parts are self-evident, though his explanation of them is helpful in exploring concrete examples of their relevance to the concept of justice. For example, Lord Bingham argues that the law must be accessible, intelligible and predictable; that questions of legal right and liability should be resolved by application of the law and not the exercise of discretion; that the law should apply equally to all; and that all elected and unelected officials must exercise their powers in good faith, fairly, for the purpose for which the powers were conferred, and not exceed the limits of such powers, or apply them unreasonably.

A fifth component element (ie that the law must afford adequate protection of fundamental human rights) is according to the author “not a principle which would be universally accepted as embraced within the rule of law”. However, he argues that the rule of law cannot be understood as a procedural concept devoid of substance. Drawing on the experiences of Stalinist Russia and Fascist Germany, Bingham notes with approval the post WWII international texts that treat “democratisation, the rule of law, respect for human rights and good governance, as inseparably interlinked”.

Bingham adds another three other elements to his analysis: means must be provided for resolving, without prohibitive cost or inordinate delay, bona fide civil disputes; all state adjudicative procedures must be fair; and the rule of law requires compliance by the state with its obligations in international law as in national law. In this last but important categorisation, Bingham explores “what many would reasonably regard as the most fundamental preoccupation of international law: the resort to war”. In an authoritative but concise way, the book details the lead-up to the Iraq war by way of Security Council resolutions and the Attorney General’s advice to the UK government. He concludes “If I am right that the invasion of Iraq by the US, the UK and some other states was unauthorised by the Security Council there was, of course, a serious violation of international law and of the rule of law”.

The former Senior Law Lord argues that there are two serious deficiencies in the rule of law within the international arena. The first lies in the willingness of some states to rewrite the rules (“as the UK did in relation to the Suez crisis of 1956”), and the second lies in the fact that the International Court of Justice can only adjudicate cases if the parties agree to its authority. Bingham believes that “If the daunting challenges now facing the world are to be overcome, it must be in important part through the medium of rules, internationally agreed, internationally implemented and, if necessary, internationally enforced”.

Having dissected the rule of law into its component parts, the author then explores two themes. In the first – the impact on the rule of law of terrorism - and Bingham looks at the different responses in the US and the UK, but also the similarities. He concludes that terrorism tests adherence to the rule of law to the utmost but cites approvingly the Council of Europe statement that if a state reacts with indiscriminate measures it would “fall into the trap set by terrorism for democracy and the rule of law”.

A second theme is the (in)compatibility between the doctrine of parliamentary sovereignty and the rule of law. In addition to raising some issues about whether the principle of parliamentary sovereignty applies in Scotland at all (an issue I was unaware of previously), he holds that “the judges did not by themselves establish the principle and they cannot by themselves change it”. Moreover, he embraces this limitation on the authority of the judiciary, noting “the British people have not repelled the extraneous power of the papacy in spiritual matters and the pretensions of royal power in temporal, in order to subject themselves to the unchallengeable rulings of unelected judges”. This finding however implies that if the Westminster parliament is not answerable to the judiciary, it may in effect not be subject to the rule of law.

Bingham is drawn to the conclusion that the current constitutional settlement has become unbalanced “and the power to restrain legislation favoured by a clear majority of the Commons has become much weakened, even if, exceptionally, such legislation were to infringe the rule of law”. If he is right, and he argues his case well, then the risk is not merely one of increasing conflict between parliament and the judiciary, but also serious constitutional uncertainty. He offers no easy solution but believes that if parliamentary sovereignty is to be replaced by a codified and entrenched constitution, this would constitute a major societal change, and a broad and informed debate would be essential.

*Maggie Beirne*

## Civil Liberties Diary - April

### 2<sup>nd</sup> April

Writing to the letters page of the Newsletter, PSNI Chief Constable Matt Baggott states that the Historical Enquiries Team will get more time and resources to finish its work should that be needed.

### 8<sup>th</sup> April

It is announced that the publication of the Saville Inquiry into the deaths of 14 people on Bloody Sunday is to be delayed until after the General Election. Relatives of those killed call on any new government to make the report available a priority.

### 12<sup>th</sup> April

Around 100 family members and supporters of Maghaberry prisoners stage a protest outside the gates of the prison to call for an international human rights observer to see conditions in the jail first hand. Chief among the prisoners' complaints is the effect industrial action by prison staff is having on them.

### 13<sup>th</sup> April

In a joint statement, two health trusts publicly apologise for "inexcusable failures" surrounding the psychiatric treatment of a suicidal woman who had smothered her daughter and then took her own life. The authorities' expressions of remorse were part of a settlement of two civil actions which followed the deaths of Madeleine and Lauren O'Neill.

Victims Commissioner, Patricia McBride, vows to battle to save 'Justice for the Forgotten' after the group is told its funding will be cut. The Commissioner said she hoped that the help for the group could be secured through the Community Relations Council. The group represents victims of the Dublin/Monaghan bombings.

### 15<sup>th</sup> April

Solicitors acting for Margaret Keeley announce that an IRA spy alleged to be the British army agent "Stakeknife" could be forced into court. She is claiming damages against the Chief Constable over her RUC arrest claiming that her husband must have informed his handlers that she had no involvement. In February 1994 they were held and interrogated by the IRA.

### 16<sup>th</sup> April

Northern Ireland's senior coroner criticises the Chief Constable for his handling of an official request to trace files related to controversial Troubles murders. John Leckey said the reply he received from the police in response to a letter to Matt Baggott asking for information gathered by the Stephens Inquiry was "far from satisfactory."

### 19<sup>th</sup> April

The PSNI use CS gas in Ballycastle following an outbreak of trouble involving a number of young people.

### 20<sup>th</sup> April

The High Court in Belfast imposes protection orders for two girls held to be at risk of being sent from Northern Ireland for forced marriages in Pakistan. Mr. Justice Stephens made the ruling on behalf of the children aged 12 and 14, after the authorities claimed false documents were produced as part of a planned deception by their parents.

At the Court of Appeal, lawyers for the Chief Constable announce they are to press for full costs after winning a multi-million pound case against rank and file police officers who claimed damages for post traumatic stress.

### 21<sup>st</sup> April

The SDLP criticises new proposals to replace the Parades Commission as likely to escalate tensions during the marching season. The existing Commission is due to end on 31st December.

### 27<sup>th</sup> April

Appearing before the Industrial Tribunals in Belfast, former BBC NI presenter Jerome Quinn represents himself against the corporation. His claim alleges that he was unfairly dismissed and suffered discrimination in his post.

### 28<sup>th</sup> April

The High Court in Belfast hears that prosecuting authorities should have considered bringing perjury charges against RUC officers over the plastic bullet killing of Nora McCabe in 1981. However, judges dismissed a legal challenge by her family against the DPP or failing to charge any of the officers involved because it had taken 25 years to bring the case to court.

Compiled by Mark Bassett from various newspapers

## Just News

**Just News** welcomes readers' news, views and comments.

**Just News** is published by the Committee on the Administration of Justice Ltd.

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